

PCC and CC Force Inspection response record

Version:

Force	Staffordshire
Police and Crime Commissioner	Ben Adams
Chief Constable	Chris Noble
Title of inspection	Staffordshire Cause of Concern responding to vulnerable people
Inspectorate	 <p>Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services</p>
Summary of inspection	<p>We have issued two accelerated causes of concern to Staffordshire Police as a result of its failure to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> adequately identify or assess victim vulnerability at first point of contact; and carry out sufficiently effective investigations.
Grade	
Recommendations	<p>The force needs to improve how it identifies and assesses vulnerability at first point of contact.</p> <p>Recommendations: Within three months, Staffordshire Police should make sure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> call handlers use and correctly record structured initial triage and risk assessments – this will help the force know what priority it should give the call and allow it to decide on the most appropriate response; vulnerable and repeat callers are routinely identified, as are other people in the household who may also be vulnerable; and call handlers give relevant advice on the preservation of evidence and crime prevention. <p>The force needs to make sure that it carries out effective investigations and that it gives victims the support they need.</p> <p>Recommendations: Within six months: Staffordshire Police should make sure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> it completes investigation plans to give direction and identify lines of inquiry at an early stage; investigations are actively and regularly supervised and have their progress reviewed, and that all proportionate lines of inquiry are followed; it pursues evidence-led prosecutions when a victim withdraws support for the investigation; and it complies with the requirements established in the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime and that it completes victim needs assessments.

Police Crime and Commissioner's initial response

I welcome the additional scrutiny that HMICFRS have offered during this inspection. The concerns identified in regards to how the force conducts investigations and the ways the force identify vulnerability when members of the public make first contact are of great significance and partially formed the basis for my recently launched police and crime plan which provides the strategic direction for the force over the next three years.

As Commissioner, I was fully aware of the issues raised by HMICFRS thanks to the regular performance meetings I hold with the force. Contact centre performance and victim experience remains my focus at internal performance meetings and will continue to be at the forefront of public meetings until we receive assurance that victims receive the service they deserve.

Work to translate this strategic plan into a series of improvement activities linked to the force's new operating model has already begun which will address these problems head on.

I understand the frustration that some fundamental police services are not up to the standards the people of Staffordshire expect and deserve. People expect calls to be answered quickly, for the police to respond rapidly and to deal effectively with problems in their area.

I share these frustrations and aim to rebuild public confidence by rebalancing the essential activities needed to protect vulnerable people within our community.

Chief Constable's response

Statement of Commitment to Address the Accelerated Causes of Concern

"I recognise and acknowledge the shortcomings identified by HMICFRS and the concerns raised with me about specific areas of our service. They are areas I am personally concerned about, and have been for some time, and I feel it is important I bring them to the public's attention.

"The first concern relates to conducting effective investigations, and ensuring that we aren't just dealing with and investigating the reported crime, but also supporting victims and keeping them updated throughout the criminal justice process.

"The second is in respect of our handling of calls and requests for service from the public. In particular, the early investigative actions we take when the public first contact us to ensure we understand victims' vulnerabilities and victims' needs.

"I take these concerns very seriously and I want to give my personal assurances to the people of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent that we are already taking action swiftly and comprehensively to address these. Me and my staff know we must perform better in these areas and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner has recently levelled the same challenge on our Public Performance Meeting and

has stated he will continue to do so. Whilst we have been working hard to drive improvements in our service in these, and indeed, other areas – we must and will do more.

“I recently announced that we had undertaken a large-scale review of our local policing model - the results of which will see significant changes to how we deliver policing in local communities and for victims of crime. We are investing in hundreds more officers in our frontline response teams and going from three hubs to ten local bases to ensure we get to victims and our communities faster and have more time to spend when we are there to investigate crime and care for victims. These changes will also see an enhancement to our existing functions within the force Contact and Control Centre, so we can protect the vulnerable as soon as they contact us for support.

“These fundamental changes to how we do policing in Staffordshire go to the heart of the challenges understood by our Commissioner and the Inspectorate. However, we are not simply waiting for that new model to land. In the interim, we are implementing well-developed plans to improve our service in the areas of public contact and investigations - these will now be further accelerated to ensure improvement is seen quickly and sustainably. These draw on best practice from other forces, on feedback from victims and the public, and also our own staff who are passionate about delivering the best possible service they can. They regularly tell me how frustrated they feel when they sense that they, we, are letting victims down.

“I expect to be held to account over these matters, not only by the inspectorate, but also by the public. As I have previously noted the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner is already aware of, and is currently holding me to account on these and other matters, and the next Public Performance Meeting will go through these challenges in further detail. That public scrutiny is important.

“Of course, there are relevant challenges for policing in increasing officer numbers, coping with the impact of the pandemic and picking up demand from other under pressure organisations. However, my responsibility as Chief Constable is to deliver the outstanding local policing service that the people of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent expect, pay for and deserve. Our focus in these areas will be sustained and I will keep you updated on our progress.”

Specific Force Activity

The force has already identified these areas as key performance challenges and had existing plans in place to address these matters. However, the significance of HMICFRS’ findings is recognised and accepted and specific activity has been accelerated and set out to take place as a matter of urgency in order to address these as set out below:

Governance and Accountability

- A gold structure has been set up chaired at Deputy Chief Constable (DCC) level.
- The day to day improvement and co-ordination activity will be driven at Chief Superintendent level across the two areas with a direct report into an Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) level lead.
- Progress is monitored both by the Chief Constable at the monthly Executive Management Board and at the monthly Strategic Governance Board chaired by the Staffordshire Commissioner.
- Progress of the Child Protection Improvement plan is also positioned within the Gold meeting recognising the overlap but remains subject of its existing governance.

Rapid Improvement Plans

- The existing improvement plans for these areas of business, have been submitted to Corporate Development for a gap analysis which concluded that the current improvement plans are fit for purpose but aspects have been accelerated into Rapid improvement plans.
- Rapid Improvement Plans have been developed for both areas of concern that will be owned at Chief Superintendent level, and led at Chief Officer level.
- Review of activity to date has begun to evidence the force's current position and track improvements.
- Specific training activity to support colleagues to address the concerns is being delivered to frontline and supervisory roles, with work to link this appropriately into the force's learning and organisation development programme.

Performance and Audit

- Local auditing and quality assurance work continues through existing mechanisms and a centralised corporate function capability.
- A review of the forces Strategic Performance capability has accelerated the repositioning of the Performance Team to Corporate Development to develop the performance framework and monitoring for the ongoing PEEL assessment.
- The impact on the two ACoC of the operating model changes in late June 2022 will be tracked as part of realising intended benefits.

Communication Strategy

- A communication strategy has been developed both internally and externally ahead of publication and the first Gold meeting. Communication plans exist as part of the rapid improvement plans for each area with an overall communication strategy being developed.

Engagement and Support

- Review work is underway with HMICFRS, College of Policing & national Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP) with regard to identifying 'good' forces, best practice and the approaches, tools and methodologies to assist in improvement and also monitoring and auditing.
- Further detail of how engagement and support with HMICFRS is being developed with the HMICFRS Force Liaison Lead invited to Gold meetings.
- The current work and plans to deliver against the ACoC have been shared with HMI Williams and team both in correspondence from the Chief Constable and as part of the forces formal PEEL strategic briefing session to HMICFRS 30 March 2022.
- Initial views from the inspectorate were supportive around the approach the force is taking.
- A monthly update report is being submitted to HMICFRS.

Police Crime and Commissioner's overall comments

Since being elected in May 2021, I have seen officers and staff working incredibly hard to improve the service. I have recruited a new Chief Constable from outside the force to help accelerate change and ensure improvements to the force's call handling and investigation functions. The increase in officers that we will see in Staffordshire in the next two years will help us to do just that.

Whilst progress has been made, I recognise the need to move quickly to address the issues driving these failings. These action plans form a major focus of our regular internal performance meetings and I will update the public with progress in further detail at the next Public Performance Meeting in October 2022.